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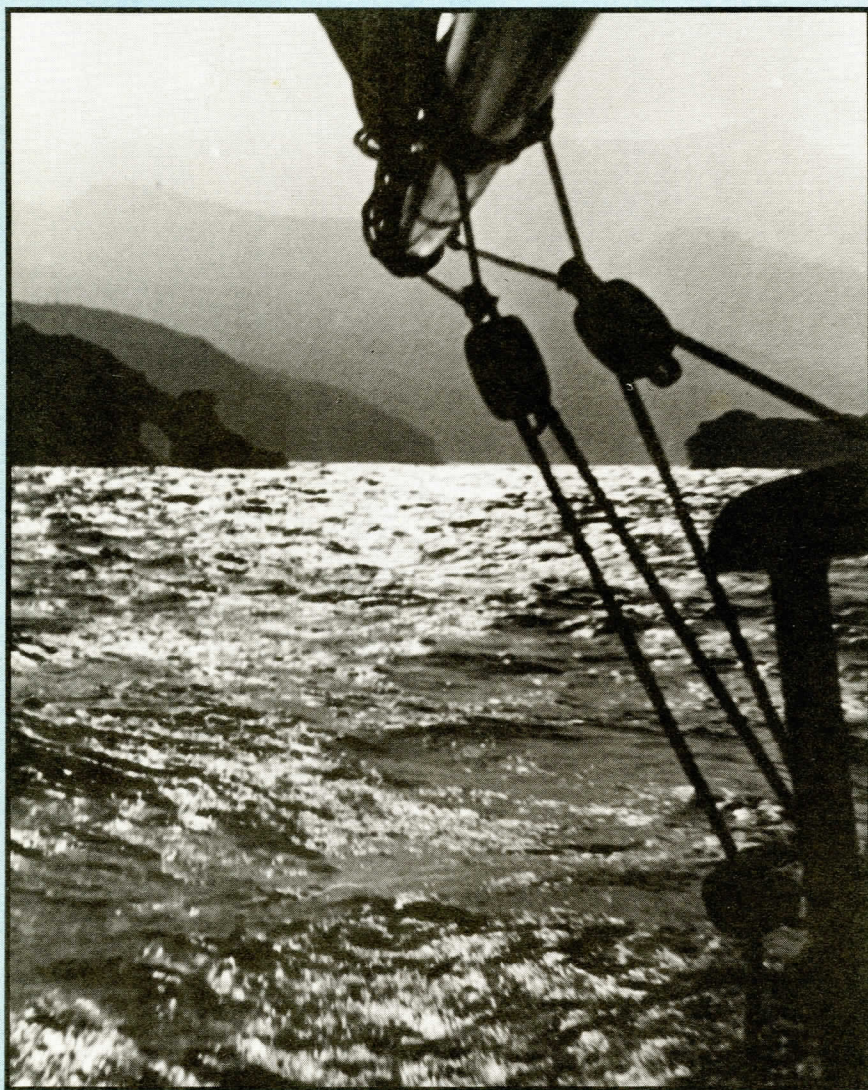
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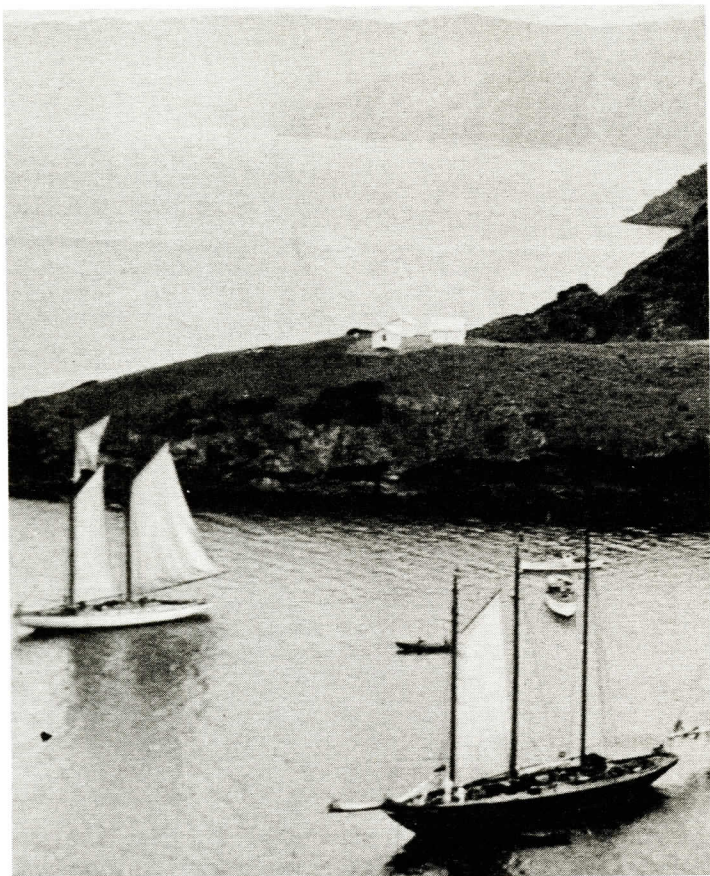
Autumn, 1988

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The Islands  
Remembered





*They all came to Santa Cruz—the famous actor on holiday, the ailing sea captain—and they left memories in the minds of those who had been at the dinner table or heard the tales: John Barrymore remembered by Helen Caire, Captain Kimberly's adventures recalled by his wife, and a contribution from a former resident of Santa Cruz Island, the late Carey Stanton. Photos are from the collection of the Santa Barbara Historical Society unless otherwise credited.*

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# John Barrymore's Visits to Santa Cruz Island

by Helen Caire

It all began with an interesting encounter. One August day in 1919, my father, Fred Caire, was in the vineyard in the vicinity of the chapel, inspecting the state of the young grape clusters, when a stranger approached through the chest-high vines.<sup>1</sup> The man was slim, of medium height, hatless; his hair, receding somewhat from a high forehead, was black, and very blue eyes seemed bluer in his slender, tanned face. The profile, finely chiseled, was classic and unmistakable.

John Barrymore introduced himself and my father greeted him cordially. Years later, on return trips to the island, Barrymore used to repeat the story of the encounter, marvelling at my father's hospitality. He would begin, "There I was in a khaki shirt, old sweater and trousers..." and would continue, making much of the meeting.

He explained that he was on vacation at Pelican Bay Camp with some friends from Montecito. (Since many persons

were interested in seeing the island, the Santa Cruz Island Company leased a cove on the Channel coast west of Prisoners' Harbor to Captain Ira Eaton. He transported sportsmen, movie companies and whatever holiday groups wished to cross the Channel in his *Sea Wolf*.)

My father and John Barrymore talked for a long while, standing among the glistening green vines, the actor occasionally running a hand through his hair, his nervous eyes betraying fatigue. He very gladly accepted my father's invitation to lunch.

After a long and successful run of *The Jest* (1919) in New York, he was extremely tired and needed a rest, he explained. He was a fascinating conversationalist; among other things, he discussed Sem Benelli and *La Cena delle Beffe*. The great

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Helen Caire is a granddaughter of Justinian Caire, the major stockholder in the Santa Cruz Island Company from 1880 until his death in 1897. She has previously written about the island for NOTICIAS.

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Pelican Bay was a popular anchorage for yachtsmen. This 1922 view shows the dining hall of Eaton's camp in left background.

actor laughed, "I felt like a long string bean in those green tights." He mentioned that he was reading *The Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse* and told my sister Jeanne that he would send it to her.

Because my father and Barrymore hit it off so well and he was such good company, he and his friends were invited for dinner a day or two later. Naturally, it was a dinner for grown-ups and not for little girls. Marie and Jeanne were to be present, but I was supposed to go on a picnic with my younger sisters and cousins. I can vividly recall how I begged my mother, teased and wheedled to let me attend, until she laughed and yielded.

The guests arrived around noon. The tour of the Main Ranch included the winery, of course, so we walked eastward along the road to the large building of red bricks, fired in island kilns in my grandfather's time. My father unlocked one of the huge double doors and we en-

tered. Since the rear of the winery was carved out of the hillside, within, it was cavernously cool, shadowy and echoing. As we walked around, dwarfed by the enormous casks, my father pointed out the oldest ones of aged oak and discussed island wines. Before leaving, the guests were, of course, treated to wine tasting, a vintage Riesling.

As to the dinner, Num outdid himself, except for the stuffed zucchini prepared by my mother. Barrymore gasped in delight at the

sight of them and rolled his large fatiguenervous eyes in mock ecstatic pose.

"Ambrosia!" he murmured dramatically. "Too good to eat!"

"If it were done, when 'tis done, then 'twere well it were done quickly," my father laughed, lifting his fork in a gesture of mock menace at his plate.

"Let the assassination trammel up the consequence," was Barrymore's rejoinder as he happily speared the succulent zucchini, topped by fawn-colored, buttered breadcrumbs.

The actor was in the heyday of his brilliance and wit. My father enjoyed the theatre. He was a Shakespeare buff and knew reams of the plays by heart. If only tape recorders had been invented then, that dinner conversation, especially between my father and John Barrymore, would have been worth recording. It bounded as the lightest crystal ball; it sparkled like cut glass in candlelight; it had the excitement of a brandied dish



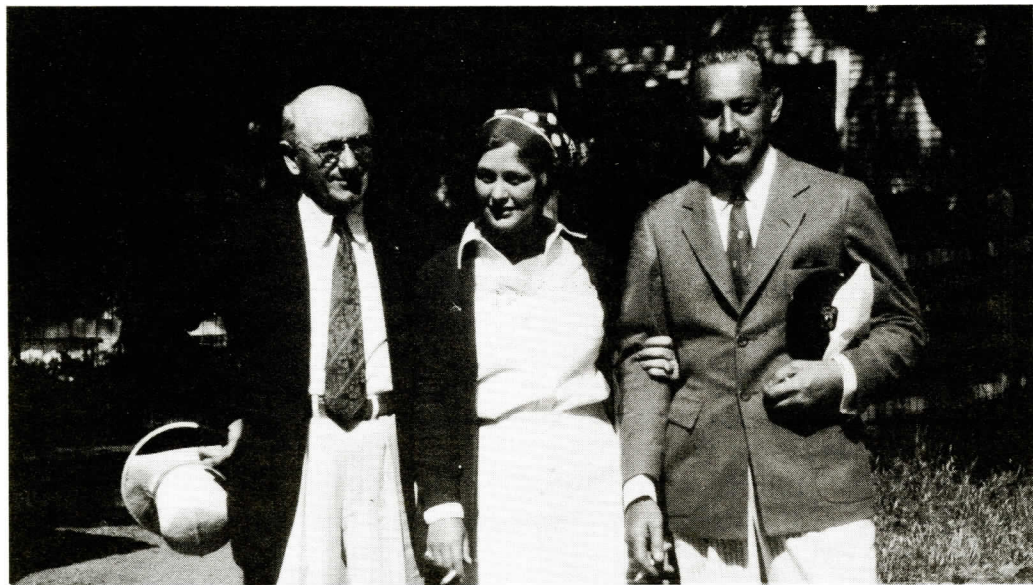
alight with aromatic flames. Remark and riposte flashed with lightning swiftness. No wonder a youngster, all eyes and ears, didn't know what she was eating!

Marie and I were scarcely noticed and had the sense to listen. But Jeanne, blonde and attractive, in her teens, allowed to wear her hair up for the first time, drew several remarks from the actor. He had

pronounced in his most mellifluous accent, is "...and with hummingbirds in my stomach."

When the guests left, John Barrymore was carrying a box of gently packed, stuffed zucchini in one hand and a bottle of Riesling in the other.

Barrymore's next visit, some years later, was with his wife, Dolores Costello,



Left to right: Joseph Cawthorne, Dolores Costello and John Barrymore on Santa Cruz Island. Cawthorne was Barrymore's manager, Costello his wife. Photo: Helen Caire.

brought the promised book, then very popular. He seemed somewhat concerned, "I don't know if the sisters at the convent would approve..." On the flyleaf, he had sketched the head of a bearded man with a somewhat sardonic expression—himself as a character in a play?—and inscribed it. He told us that his first ambition had been to be an artist.

As dinner drew to a close, Barrymore made a witty speech of appreciation and thanks. I wish I might remember it, but the only phrase that stuck in my mind,

sweet and pretty, who called him "Winky;" their baby, and a party of friends, all of whom sailed up on the Barrymores' yacht, *Infanta*. The actor's reaction to that visit was headlined in an article in the *Santa Barbara Morning Press*, June 10, 1930. Barrymore said that someday he would like to own an island kingdom like Santa Cruz and that he envied Fred Caire more than anyone else he knew. The paper quoted Barrymore as saying, "It is the greatest institution of its kind in the world, being so near Santa





Mr. and Mrs. Fred Caire indulge in the 1920's passion for Pee-Wee golf at the Main Ranch on Santa Cruz Island. Photo: Helen Caire.

Barbara, the supercivilized community. The supercivilized may be taken as you will."

The last visit of John Barrymore occurred years later. We were aboard the yacht of friends in Pelican Bay where the *Infanta* was also anchored. Hearing that some of the Caires were aboard, he came over for a visit. Time had added some weight to the slim, brilliant actor of his first arrival and gray lightly threaded his once coal-black hair. When he recounted again his first meeting with my father, he sported the dapper blue jacket, white trousers and visored cap of the yachtsman. With him were his sister, Ethel Barrymore, and her son, Sam Colt. We invited them up to the Main Ranch for a visit the next afternoon.

The island lay serene on a balmy summer day. Ethel Barrymore was not feeling very well at the time, so the ride up the Cañada del Puerto on the creekbed road was rather hard on her. Though she was interested in everything about the place, she was not up to walking around the Main Ranch.

We sat under the pine and brought her



Right: The creekbed road up the Cañada del Puerto on Santa Cruz.



Castilian roses. She loved the pretty pink flowers with their golden hearts and sweet fragrance, which could fill the large living room in a few hours.

John Barrymore was eager to play a round of Pee-Wee golf on the course we had rigged up nearby in the enclosure. The game was all the rage at the time and the visitors were surprised to see its layout on the Island. The great actress stands out in my memory as a gracious person with a delightful, deep chuckle and a nice, low voice. The summer afternoon waned pleasantly with talk and refreshments.

When we drove back to Prisoners' Harbor, the pines behind the beach were casting long shadows toward the shore where low waves lapped almost soundlessly.<sup>2</sup>

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### Editor's Notes

1. Among the many buildings erected under Justinian Caire's direction were a chapel and wineries. A variety of wines was produced and the business was carried on by Caire's sons. Prohibition stopped the production of wine, although grapes continued to be sold for a time.

2. These visits to Santa Cruz Island were not Barrymore's first to the Santa Barbara area. In 1916, Barrymore appeared in James Barrie's play, *Pantaloon*, at the Santa Barbara Country Club.

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*Below: The Main Ranch on Santa Cruz Island. Note vineyards in the foreground. Wine making facilities were maintained on the island for many years with an aging area for wine in oak casks dug partially into a hillside.*

